

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL

OF

POPULAR

LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND ART.

Fourth Series

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM AND ROBERT CHAMBERS.

No. 60.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1865.

PRICE 1½d.

THE MEN.

THE Men are fast fading away. I do not mean the sterner sex of the human family, but a remarkable class of religious teachers, who have exerted a prodigious influence upon the social and spiritual life of the Highlands of Scotland for a long series of generations. Opinion has varied much with respect to the character of this influence. Some have argued that the Men have been the bane of the districts in which they have lived and laboured. It has been urged that these volunteer teachers of the people have, as a rule, been ignorant and fanatical apostles of a gloomy and debasing corruption of the Christian faith; and that the whole tendency of their teaching has been to foster superstition, and to keep alive a wild and soul-darkening exaggeration of Calvinism. On the other hand, there are those who will tell you that the Men have been the salt of the Scottish Highlands. They will refer you to times when, as they allege, the Church of Scotland was a state institution, and nothing more; when her clergy were state functionaries, and not ministers of the gospel; when the sentinels in Sion's watch-towers slept at their posts, and the enemy was allowed 'to come in like a flood.' They will tell you that in those days of spiritual darkness, the flame of a purer faith was kept alive in remote corners of the land by these unlettered but earnest Men; and that, but for this lay-element in the spiritual instruction of the people, the Highlands must have sunk into something like heathenism. I do not propose to decide between these conflicting views; but one fact is patent, that, whether for good or ill, the Men have long wielded a weighty influence in the north and north-west of Scotland. Nor is this surprising: for in common with all the other branches of the Celtic race, the Scottish Highlanders are an intensely religious people, filled with that faith which is 'the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for.'

The average Highland parish is far beyond the powers of any individual clergyman. A good deal has been done of late years in the way of church

extension in Scotland. The great Secession may be said to have given every parish two clergymen, where only one laboured before. But fifty years ago, and even more recently, matters were in a different position. A clergyman suddenly found himself placed in charge of an immense tract of mountain and moss, sparsely dotted here and there with the humble dwellings of his flock. However anxious to do his duty, it is easy to understand how a man intrusted with such a parish might find himself unequal to the work before him. A curate was a resource not to be dreamed of, and the native catechists, or Men, naturally grew out of such a state of things. But there was another cause which operated strongly in building the Men up into a spiritual power of some consequence; I refer to the great controversy on the subject of church patronage, which finally, in 1843, rent the Church of Scotland asunder. I cannot better state this part of the case than by quoting the following extract from an article which I have just seen in a Scotch journal. The writer is describing the career of a clergyman of the Free Church who died recently. 'In 1844,' he says, 'Mr — was translated to the parish of —, in Inverness-shire. The people of this parish had not for a long time been favoured with what they esteemed as a truly gospel ministry. It has been said that the gospel had not been preached there, save through occasional visits from stranger ministers, since the Reformation; and yet the parish was remarkable for the number of its intelligent, devoted Christians. Few parishes in the Highlands could in this respect be compared with it. Much of this was owing, under God, to the character and teaching of the admirable catechist of the parish, who died about five-and-twenty years ago, but whose memory is savoury, not only in this part, but over the whole neighbouring parishes, and in parts of Ross-shire.'

I have said that the Men are passing away. They are still, however, to be found in certain parts of the country, the objects of an almost idolatrous veneration. I know of no class of persons on the southern side of the Tweed at all resembling the Men. The Methodist local preacher occurs to my

mind, but he only bears a faint resemblance to the lay-apostle of the Highlands. The Men are almost a distinct caste: a person familiar with Highland life would be able to pick them out in a crowd almost as easily as he would a bevy of bishops in their Episcopal robes. They wear an air of indescribable sanctity. I have seen a large number of these Men, and I do not remember to have ever met one of them without a large flowing camel cloak. I think, as a rule, they would also be found wearing a light-brown scratch-wig, or a cotton handkerchief bound about the head. In gait and language, they are peculiar—the most striking instance I know of a distinctive 'walk and conversation.' Altogether, their appearance is not without a certain sort of rude impressiveness; and those who know the Highlanders cannot wonder that such men—marvellously well read in the Scriptures, gifted with ready if rude speech, generally blameless in life, and marked by a strong spice of dogmatism—should have become a power in the secluded districts in which they have so long flourished.

I am not now writing for Scotchmen, who may be familiar with the subject which I have taken in hand; but there are thousands, I dare say, in the southern portion of North Britain, and millions, I venture to say, south of the Border, who have but a faint idea of what a Highland Sacrament-time is. In many districts of the Highlands, the Holy Communion is celebrated only once a year, and the occasion is one of great solemnity and impressiveness. Every reader of Burns is familiar with the terrible satire of the *Holy Fair*; but nothing could less resemble the Highland Sacrament-time than the celebration upon which the great Scottish poet has let loose the phials of his wrath. The ritual, if I may so speak, is the same; but there is no parallel between the conduct of the worshippers and sightseers at the Highland Communion and the orgies which Burns has described. Sacrament-time extends over five days—Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. There is always a mighty gathering from the surrounding districts—some persons walking as many as thirty, and perhaps a greater number of miles, in order to be present at the high festival. The Men are usually to be found in great strength on such occasions; indeed, the question eagerly passes: 'Has Donald This or Roderick That come?' Much of what I hope I may not irreverently call the success of the gathering, depends upon the answer to this question. As in every other class, there are among the Men stars which differ from one another in glory. There are Men whose presence at such solemnities is welcomed as if it were a special mark of favour from Heaven. The minister of the parish is assisted at Sacrament-time by several brother-clergymen; but the absence of any preacher of local note is, as a general rule, less a matter of regret than the non-appearance of one of the Men who has proved himself 'mighty in the Scriptures.'

There is usually no room for the Men in the opening services of Thursday, the first day of the sacramental feast. They take a post of honour in the congregation; but all the services in the church and on the hillside are conducted, in the early part of the day, by regularly-ordained ministers. Their work commences in the evening. Thursday is called the 'fast-day'; but this is a pious fiction. The Men are taken care of by the most favourably

situated of the parishioners, and due provision is made for their temporal wants, which are not treated lightly. The regular services are followed by exceptionally good dinners, and the dinners are in their turn succeeded by prayer-meetings, in which the Men are in the ascendant. A curious custom obtains at these prayer-meetings. When a person is called upon to offer up a prayer, he knows, and everybody else knows, that he must comply with the request; but a ready response is never looked for. The Men go to the meeting with a full knowledge that the person presiding will ask them to pray, or address the people; but when the call is made, it is met with a non-compliant shake of the head, which is followed by a short interval of dreadful silence and suspense. A second request is equally unsuccessful; the call has to be repeated, and after a few more demonstrations of diffident unwillingness to rise, the prayer is commenced. Some of these prayers are marvellous outpourings of worship and supplication, uttered by uneducated men. They, of course, often lack correctness of expression; but I have heard from the lips of these rude teachers wonderful descriptions of the attributes of the Almighty, and singularly minute and striking statements of the wants of the human soul. The impression produced by these utterances is to some extent heightened by the manner of delivery—a kind of intoning, which in some cases is well sustained and not disagreeable, while in others it is wild and irregular. In ordinary conversation, this intoning is never heard; it is as much a part of the religious exercises of these simple people as the more formal intoning of the church-service is part of the cathedral system of England.

Passing over the Friday and Saturday of the Highland Sacrament-time, I would ask the reader to accompany me to the great service of Sunday. We have reached the church in good time. The services do not commence for an hour or more yet; but here we find already collected an immense assembly of old and young. Mr Spurgeon's tabernacle would scarcely accommodate that vast throng. The church is already full, and we join the host of worshippers who have arranged themselves on the hillside. From every point of the compass, men, women, and children are still trudging in. Here comes one of the Men. Mark his measured step, and the solemn aspect of authority which the enjoyment of years of deferential respect has impressed upon his face. See how the crowd makes way for him! He takes no note of the mass of human beings around. His outward eye rests upon the ground, from which he was taken; his inward eye would seem to be equally fixed upon some soul-engrossing object. The solemnity of that figure is tremendous, and no one can be astonished that it is permitted to glide without interruption to a spot of honour, where similar figures may already be seen seated. That spot is marked by a sombre-coloured wooden 'tent,' very much resembling a sentry-box. This tent is the pulpit of the clergyman who has to conduct the open-air service. In front of it is ranged a series of long tables, and here the Men will by and by have to minister in a subordinate capacity. But there are other people in this picturesque congregation who attract the stranger's notice. Here is a venerable gray-haired peasant trudging painfully along. Surely he requires no

introduction. You must have seen him before, the 'priest-like father' of the *Cotter's Saturday Night*. But these hooded women in dark cloaks—who are they? Sisters of Mercy? Well, the mistake was natural. These women are known here as 'mothers in Israel.' If you look through the congregation, you will find many hooded cloaks and close-fitting linen caps; but the women whom you have picked out are women who have acquired a high reputation for sanctity; and many of them deserve it. They do not preach or pray in public; they bow reverently to St Paul's interdict on this point; but in private life they make their influence strongly felt, and it is often a matter of some importance for a clergyman to secure their confidence, and what is called their 'good word.' What strangely solemn-looking children are here—children looking the Shorter Catechism from the first question to that 'Finis' at the end, which has puzzled so many youthful understandings. And those young people who have paired themselves over the ground—well, I suppose even the Men were once young men, and the 'mothers in Israel' must once have been young women; and youth will be youth. But all is propriety—gloomy propriety—down to the shepherd's colly who demurely rests at his master's feet.

The minister is now in the tent, and the service begins. The 'preliminaries' over, the great duty of the day is entered upon—the administration of the Holy Communion. The Scotch Presbyterians are amongst the sturdiest declaimers against what they call superstitious views respecting the Lord's Supper; but I do not believe that, even in a Roman Catholic place of worship, you would see the consecrated bread and wine approached with greater awe and reverence than in such a congregation as I am endeavouring to describe. The communicants take their places at the tables in front of the tent of which I have already spoken. The tables are what is called 'fenced' by the officiating minister, who points out, in language which it is impossible to misunderstand, the terrible consequences of 'unworthy' participation in the solemnity; and the result is seen in the timid and hesitating approach of the intending communicants. It is with the greatest difficulty that they can be induced to come forward; and as you watch them tremblingly advance, it is impossible to avoid thinking that they believe that they are about to take part in a fearful mystery. Much of this deeply-touching demeanour is no doubt due to the circumstance that they communicate in the presence of the whole congregation, and that what they do amounts to a solemn religious pledge, by which they bind themselves to a particular course of life before thousands of their fellow-Christians. But I cannot help thinking that there is a far deeper feeling than this—a deeper feeling, too, than the Presbyterian theory of the Lord's Supper might be supposed to inspire. The 'serving of the tables' is watched with great reverence by the non-communicants of the congregation. The people receive the sacrament sitting. They are seated on each side of the tables, and the bread and wine having been blessed by the clergyman, the sacred emblems are handed, or rather pushed, round by laymen such as the Men. As it very seldom happens that the tables can accommodate the whole of the communicants at once, the tables are several times served, the celebration usually occupying

a considerable time in consequence of the exhortations so frequently required to bring up the shrinking members of the church. At the tables, every head is reverently bowed down, and it is almost painful to watch the unsteady hands which are stretched forth, one after another, to take the symbols of the great Sacrifice. This is the Sunday of Sundays, and is entirely devoted to religious exercises. The regular services are followed by prayer-meetings, and in some districts these gatherings are carried beyond midnight.

With the services of the following day, Monday, the Feast of Tabernacles comes to an end, and we will follow the Men to their respective parishes. They all belong to the humbler classes. In this respect they differ but little from a large proportion of the clergy; but then the latter have had the benefit of an education which has at least carried them through the examinations which stand between a Scotchman and the pulpit. Human learning does not pass for much with the Men; what they demand, above all things, in a minister, is that he shall have 'grace.' I am afraid that this little word means something more than personal piety; in the mouths of the Men, it means adhesion to certain venerable shibboleths, and even to a certain style and manner of preaching and praying. The thunders and lightnings of Sinai, and the denunciations of the Hebrew prophets, possess for them a strong attraction. Their whole language is tinged with the orientalism of the Old Testament. There are, of course, however, gentle natures among them whose cry is ever, 'Comfort ye my people.' One of these meek primitive teachers, whom I knew, was gathered to his fathers a month or two ago. He was a man whom his many friends would describe as one who literally 'walked with God.' He was regarded as one of whom it might in a special sense be said that his 'life and conversation was in heaven.' He lived far away from any church, but he held that the presence of the Father of All was not limited to consecrated stone and lime; that God dwelt with men, and not with agglomerations of masonry. Solitary dwellers in the wilderness sought his lonely cottage on the Day of Rest, and to him and to them the humble dwelling was the 'house of God' and the 'gate of heaven.' Nor was his influence merely confined to those who were within walking-distance of his moorland home. With persons many miles away, he carried on a remarkable correspondence; tenderly breaking to them, in his own way, the Bread of Life, and proclaiming the unbounded love and goodness of his Father in heaven. His surname was, I think, Sutherland, but he was known and is remembered as John Badbea—Badbea being the name of the place where he lived. But while I could tell of others of the same character, I am bound to say that the tendency of the teaching of the great body of the Men whom I have known has been less wholesome. There are many good people on the English side of the Tweed who do not consider St Athanasius a model of Christian charity, but that worthy Father's damnable clauses are not one whit more categorical than the judgments I have heard pronounced by the Men, or the ministers of their special choice, against—not Socinians or dreadful heretics of any sort—but against persons who have been guilty of the mildest departure from the coarsest form of Calvinism, or who have ventured to indulge

in the most innocent amusement. If you don't make a beast of yourself, you may drink raw whisky, but on no account can you take part in a dance. Newspapers, with a few, very few, bright exceptions are held to be instruments of the enemy; and I take it that *Chambers's Journal* would be deemed an abomination.

A spiritual tyranny like this would, of course, be impossible, or of very limited power, in a thickly-peopled district in communication with the rest of the world; but in the secluded Highlands of Scotland, the Men have been able to reign supreme. I by no means agree with those who have regarded them as an unmixed evil. Considering the peculiar circumstances of the districts in which they have lived, I think there is much to be said on the other side. I once heard of the minister of a parish in a far-north county who was much fonder of field-sports than of clerical work. One morning in winter, he left the manse or parsonage, intending to have a few hours' shooting. He soon came upon a christening-party on their way to his house; but the reverend gentleman did not feel disposed to turn back with them. Looking around, he saw a pond which was frozen over. He directed his astonished parishioners to accompany him to this piece of water, and there the ceremony was performed, the parson obtaining water by driving the but-end of his gun through the ice. Naturally enough, his flock did not relish ministrations of this sort, and a conventicle was set up in the parish. One Sunday morning, his daughter directed his attention to the fact, that the people were crowding in the direction of the improvised place of worship. 'Jeannie,' he replied, 'd'ye see them taking any of my steepest awa' wi' them?' Now—assuming this story to be true, and the clergyman of whom it is told has been dead many years—here was just the spot for Men to grow and flourish. But times have changed; the Men are passing away, leaving behind them men as good as they, with zeal tempered by an enlightened judgment.

LADY FLAVIA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LORD LYNN'S WIFE.'

CHAPTER XV.—THE HERON'S FEATHERS.

'GEE up, then; gee up, horse!' cried the wagoner, without the remotest suspicion that he was addressing his team in corrupted Hindustani, and then, as the talismanic 'gee' produced no effect, he added the words: 'Ar-woot! c'mither, woot!' cracking his whip the while. The leading horse, however, a more sensible animal than his driver, planted his broad fore-feet firmly on the road, and refused to budge an inch; but stood smorting and jangling his bells—the bells that in conjunction with flaunting tassels, and brass plates, and red fringe, ornamented the gay wagon-harness.

'What ails old Dobbin?' asked Roger the wagoner, exceedingly puzzled, and not at all sure of what his next move ought to be; for wagoners proper, who live with their horses, carry their whips more for display than for use, and manage their four-footed subordinates much more by appealing to their better feelings and sense of propriety than by hard blows, such as town-bred carters too often resort to in default of the true

language of the Houghynyns. 'What ails old Dobbin?' therefore said Roger. 'Look, Bill, if there's a sack in the road.'

Bill, the wagoner's 'mate,' came tumbling down from among the mountainous corn-sacks with which the blue wain, now on its way from Broomead Farm to Slochester market, was piled. Bill was half asleep; but he roused himself up by digging his red knuckles into his drowsy eyes, and ran forward.

'A sack wouldn't frighten he,' said Bill, with more truth than grammar, for indeed Dobbin was a valuable old draught-horse, and did not take fright at trifles. The cause of his present obstinacy was soon discovered.

'Hulloa! here's a chap lying right across the road. One bit more, and we'd ha' run over him,' cried Bill; and Roger, unhooking the little lantern with which early wagoners are generally provided, came forward to reconnoitre the recumbent human figure that lay so motionless in the lane.

'He have had a drop, most like,' remarked Bill with a grin, for, in his simple philosophy, the drugged beer of the public-house could alone have furnished a valid pretext for the choice of so perilous a place of repose. But the wagoner's eyes were keener, and he dropped on one knee, close to the prostrate form, earnestly exclaiming: 'Hold your tongue, you fool. Don't ye see the blood upon him! 'Tis a murdered man!' And so, to the horrified eyes of the two farming-men, did the helpless figure on the ground appear to be. It was very dark, what with fog and the gray uncertain light of the raw morning, and the little lantern threw a yellow gleam on the prostrate form that lay so fearfully still, and on a pool of half-dried blood, in which stood the iron-shod hoofs of the fore-horse.

'He's dead, for sure!' said Bill; but Roger had touched the stranger's shoulder, and he stirred feebly, and groaned, thereby proving that some life still lingered in the poor shattered form. But he was very badly hurt, that was certain. His right arm, and side, and shoulder were stiff with clotted blood, and his coat-sleeve was ragged with shot-holes and singed by fire. The faint smell of burnt wool was still perceptible, proving that the gun that brought the victim down had been discharged with its muzzle almost touching its mark. They lifted his heavy head, and spoke to him with surprising gentleness for so rough a pair; but got no answer. There was no glance of intelligence in the half-closed eyes, and no sound, save a low moan, came from the pale lips. It was a very handsome face, despite its ghastly pallor, and the crow's feet that reckless dissipation had begun to paint around the eyes—a face set off by chestnut curls of hair, and by long tawny moustaches. A gentleman's face even in its degradation.

'An accident!' was Bill's verdict; 'his gun went off, most likely.'

But his superior, the wagoner, more shrewdly held to his own opinion, bidding Bill remark that no gun was to be seen, and that the unfortunate person, whoever he might be, was not accounted for sporting of any sort. The men held a brief debate, and finally decided that the best course to pursue would be to take on with them this unknown sufferer as far as the *Nag's Head* at Chartley, which was on their road, and

but two miles off, and there deposit him. Accordingly, though with some trouble and delay, the corn-sacks were sufficiently shifted to enable Roger and Bill to lay the passive form of the wounded man in the wagon; and off they set for the high-road, every jolt eliciting a groan from the sufferer. The two miles seemed terribly long; but at last the blue wagon came to a halt before the *Nag's Head*, and these good Samaritans in smock-frocks, Roger and Bill, knocked and shouted till they aroused the sleeping household from their slumbers. Great was the perturbation of the landlord and landlady at having a dead or dying gentleman brought to their door in the cold gray light of dawn, and loud were their exclamations when they recognised in the wounded man their truant guest, Captain Royston.

The captain had gone out rather late on the previous evening, and had not returned; but his absence had caused no particular alarm. Basil Royston was one of that numerous class who can put up with any company but that of their own solitary thoughts. He had found friends in and around Chartley, as any man may do anywhere on the one condition of distributing eleemosynary liquor to an admiring tap-room circle; and his evenings had of late been spent in the society of sundry village Lovelaces and wild apprentices from Chartley, who endured his boastful talk and arrogant patronage for the sake of his superior rank and unlimited capacity for standing treat.

And now the luckless captain had been brought back sorely wounded, dying most likely, and there was nothing to do but to put him to bed with all dispatch, to send for Dr Sankey, and to bind up his wounds, the hemorrhage from which, however, had nearly ceased, or Basil Royston must have bled to death before the medical man's arrival at his bedside. Mr Sankey, a hard-working general practitioner, who lost thirty pounds a year in drugs and port wine by his appointment of workhouse surgeon, and on whom the popular voice had conferred the degree of M.D., soon came cantering from Appleby, Churchtown, and gave his best skill and care to the task before him. The patient was still all but insensible, and the diagnosis had to proceed without any aid from him. It appeared that a heavy charge of shot had lodged in the sufferer's arm, side, and shoulder, by far the larger proportion of the leaden pellets remaining in the shoulder. There had been great loss of blood; but no artery seemed to be injured, nor, apparently, were the lungs wounded, though the discharge had been so close that the flash from the gun had set the wounded man's clothes on fire. The attack could hardly have been committed with a view to robbery, for Basil Royston's watch and trinkets, his rings, and his purse, containing many gold pieces, were still in his possession.

'Will he die, doctor?' asked Mrs Robins the landlady, following the surgeon to the door as he withdrew. But Mr Sankey was true to the etiquette of the profession, so he merely shook his head, and said that the wounds might prove fatal, certainly; but, on the other hand, science might avail to preserve the patient; after which Delphic response the oracle rode away.

'If he lives, he'll have had a squeak for his life; that's all I know about it,' remarked the surgeon in confidence to himself, as he trotted home to breakfast. 'I wonder who did it. Most

likely some jealous young clothopper of poaching proclivities. From all I can hear, the gallant captain has a turn for playing the part of Lothario; and our west-country folks are hardly civilised enough to appreciate the character.'

Then Mr Sankey, between breakfast and his next visit to his patient, penned a little paragraph for the *County Chronicle*, of which he was an occasional correspondent, and sent it in by the guard of the Honeycombe Coach. It was a piece of news that would be welcome to the editor, he was sure, since local news is seldom of a very engrossing character; and it was a capital advertisement for himself, Job Sankey, M.R.C.S.

The *County Chronicle* snapped at the bait as a starving pike at a gudgeon, promised an extra edition, and packed off a special reporter, in the shape of the editor's nephew, to Chartley Parva. But the special reporter found it more difficult to fill his note-book than he had anticipated, for the affair seemed wrapped in mystery. The wounded man was not dead; nay, he was decidedly better, and could answer, in a faint whisper—the mere ghost of his old voice—such few questions as Mr Fossdyke, the magistrate, wished to ask, and as Mr Sankey permitted. But it soon became apparent that the wounded man could throw no light upon the matter. He had not seen his assailant. He was walking home, between twelve and one o'clock, down the lane, between the thick woods, when he suddenly saw a flash that half-blinded him, and felt a blow, and then a numbing sensation of pain, that merged itself into a deathly chill and faintness; and his next recollection was of being in bed at the *Nag's Head*, with the doctor and nurse beside him.

The county constabulary did their best, searching the woods, groping about the hedgerows, and badgering with questions every man, woman, and child who pretended to the slightest hearsay knowledge of the tragical event. But no trace of the assassin could be found; and a theory to the effect that the unfortunate gentleman had been shot by mistake for somebody else became prevalent. The special reporter could only take home the tidings that under the skilful hands of that eminent practitioner, Job Sankey, Esq., the patient was likely to recover, unless some relapse should ensue; that the gentleman's name was Captain Royston; and that he had for several days resided at the *Nag's Head Inn*. Only that, and one thing more; that circumstance was, that not long since a young lady of great beauty, a resident under Lord Mortlake's roof, and a near relative of that nobleman, had visited Captain Royston at his inn, and that high words, the precise purport of which were unintelligible to her unsophisticated ears, had on that occasion been overheard by Betty, chambermaid. But this piece of information never came before the provincial public at all.

The proprietor of the *County Chronicle*, a rich corn-factor, who lived in a villa just outside Slochester, was, as it so chanced, a tenant of Lord Mortlake's, and had strong hopes of inducing the earl to consent to his purchasing his leasehold dwelling, on the gardens of which he had spent much money. Also the new branch railway, the Honeycombe, Chartley, and Slochester line, of which nascent undertaking Lord Hythe was chairman, gave its advertisements to the *Chronicle*. The authorities of that journal were unwilling to print

anything that might give umbrage at Harbledown, and they rightly conjectured that Lord Mortlake would not be pleased if Lady Flavia's name were dragged into a newspaper report of an attempted murder; wherefore no word of that young lady's visit to the *Nag's Head* was suffered to see daylight in the loyal columns of the *County Chronicle*; and the *County Gazette*, the opposition paper, which would joyfully have turned the lantern of Diogenes on Harbledown and all its indwellers, most fortunately sent no special agent to the scene of action, and never acquired an inkling of any connection between the disreputable captain and the house of Clare.

On the Monday, at the very time when the special reporter of the *County Chronicle* was getting into his gig to return to head-quarters with the meagre stock of information that he had been able to extract from the hangers-on of the inn and the puzzled police, who felt personally aggrieved at having nobody to take into custody, Big Ben presented himself at the great house. He did not come empty-handed, for he carried a bunch of long glossy feathers, dangling from a button-hole of his stained velvet coat. He came, he said, by Lady Flavia's orders, and Simmons presently conducted him to the pink room, where her young mistress was writing. Big Ben ducked his head, scraped the Aubusson carpet with his nailed boot, and presented his trophies. 'Sorry, my lady,' he said with the worst possible grace, 'that I wasn't able to get more feathers, as you desired. The birds have most died off, for no one has cared for the herons in my time, nor yet my father's; and I had to wait and wait till I thought I'd never get a shot.'

As Mr Benjamin Haynes excused himself thus, his eyes roved hither and thither, glancing at the carpet, the walls, the ceiling, or at Simmons, but never at Lady Flavia. The waiting-maid was yet in the room, in consequence of an order to remain, couched in the words: 'Don't go, Simmons,' spoken with charming ease and simplicity. Lady Flavia took up the long delicate plumes, and examined them curiously. 'These, then, are really heron's feathers,' she murmured gently. 'I always had a wish to see some of those tall plumes that our ancestors prized so much, and that princes and great barons were proud to wear. But there were no mail-packets coming in then from Africa and South America, bringing monthly consignments of ostrich and marabou plumes. There is a fashion even in feathers.'

She was leaning her graceful head upon the hand with which she had been writing, and to all appearance her thoughts were far away, lost in the mist of bygone centuries, and she had forgotten the presence of the others. Simmons was too well drilled to disturb her lady's reverie, and it was left for the tall keeper to break the silence by uneasily changing the position of his feet, and stumbling over a low footstool in doing so. The Lady Flavia Clare looked up with a bright smile. 'I need not detain you here any longer, Mr Haynes,' she said; 'I have given you a great deal of trouble to gratify a whim of mine, and here'—as she spoke she opened an ivory portemonnaie, a ladylike toy that looked fit for nothing but the enclosing of small silver or gold five-franc pieces, and carelessly extracted from it a crumpled bit of bank-paper—'here is a little present from me to your wife and

children. Never mind looking at it!' added the heiress with imperious playfulness, for the slow-witted gamekeeper had begun to unfold the precious slip of thin, tough, rustling paper. He checked himself, however, as if he had handled hot iron, made his bow and growl of acknowledgment, and was conducted down stairs by Simmons; and it was not until Big Ben was deep among the lonely woods that he ventured to draw out and examine the gift that he had received. It was a bank-note for a hundred pounds.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE HARBLEDOWN POSTBAG.

'It will very much depend on whom we get to keep the stalls,' said Mrs Dibbs, the bishop's wife; and old Miss Plummington, aunt to the Plumingtons of the Grange, nodded a cordial assent.

'To be sure it will,' chimed in a stronger-minded spinster, Miss Billingsley, daughter of a former Dean of Slochester, and who, as having been born and bred in the precincts of the cathedral, where, indeed, her whole life had been spent, was regarded as a sort of feminine minor canon at the least. Miss Billingsley, who was the oldest of young ladies, or the youngest of old ladies, lived in the Close still, with her poor deformed sister Maud, who had but one pleasure, the anthem; and she was deservedly respected, and a little feared. Even Mrs Dibbs, a lady who did not lightly veil her crest in social contests, would by no means have cared to engage in hostilities with Miss Billingsley, who was not quarrelsome, but remarkably fearless and outspoken.

'To be sure it will,' said Miss Billingsley. 'Nothing in the world depends so much upon management, and nothing, if ill managed, turns out so flat a failure, as a fancy fair. Don't you think so, Lady Mortlake?' And Lady Mortlake, who made one of the council, smiled her acceptance of Miss Billingsley's apophthegm. This conversation, of which a fancy fair was the subject, took place in the great drawing-room of the bishop's palace; and as the season was still very mild, most of the party had preferred to establish themselves at some distance from the blazing fire, so that a circle of chairs and couches had been formed not far from the windows that overlooked the large and ancient garden, whose lawns had been rolled, whose trees had been trimmed, and whose beds had been made gay with flowers, for the pleasure of many successive tenants for life of the episcopal mitre and its snug revenues. That garden was beginning to assume but a faded and wintry appearance, for it was November now; but still it had a pleasant look, and none the less pleasant that several merry children, young scions of the race of Dibbs, were playing noisily among the leafless trees and smooth walks, under the patronage of a very pretty young lady, whose coquettish little hat overshadowed a mass of soft curls, fine as silk, and black as night. She, Lady Flavia Clare, had not cared to stay in the grave circle of debating ladies.

'You are too wise for me,' she had said in her own inimitable childish way. 'I shall go and make friends with the little people out there.' And to judge by the bursts of laughter, and by the eager way in which the little bishoplings crowded around their new acquaintance, Lady Flavia's intention was being carried out in a satisfactory manner.

But the talk inside the palace was earnest enough ; and it was all about the fancy fair.

Slochester was stirred to its depths. The quiet, sleepy old place, that basked, in general, like an overripe pear, in the mellow sunshine of its cosy prosperity, was now awake, and its chief inhabitants were as busy as emmets whose nest had been trodden down. Only on one subject could Slochester folks have been thus excited, and that subject was the cathedral, their boast and glory, the pride of all, and the source of daily bread to many of them. It is necessary to pass an apprenticeship of a few years in a cathedral town, before the feeling with which its indwellers regard the sacred fane that towers in their midst, can be fully understood. They think of it by day, they dream of it by night, and are given to make disparaging comparisons between rival minsters and their own darling edifice, every stone of which they love with a personal affection. No nave like ours ; no chancel so full of the glorious dust of saints and kings ; no windows so rich in gules, azure, and gold ; no bells so deep-toned ; no organ so musical ; no choristers so silver-voiced ; no precentor so tasteful ; no dean so learned and so good. Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Slochester was not backward in championing its venerable pile.

But the cathedral was in danger, not, indeed, of irreverent reforms introduced by hateful parliamentary statutes, but of toppling down bodily on the heads of the worshippers. Time had gnawed at its buttresses and pinnacles with his customary impartiality ; and as the bells were ringing one Wednesday for service, there came a crash, and a roar, and a rattle of falling masonry ; and the horrified vergers ran up to find a ghastly gap in the chancel wall and roof, whence heaps of heavy stones, and lime, and decayed wood had thundered down, crushing the sculptured effigies of Bishop Crump and St Mungo, shattering the precious panes of the memorial window put up by Dean Yellowboys, 1611 A.D. and burying the carved tombs and brasses, and the noble old altar itself, under four or five feet of rubble and dust. Worse still, the great architect who came hurrying from London to direct the restorations, decided that the central tower and the transept were in a very precarious state. The tower must be under-pinned, the roof strengthened ; fresh props, fresh buttresses were needed, unless the colossal building were intended to fall to ruin. These repairs would be costly ; and the funds at the disposal of the dean and chapter were not equal to the estimated expense.

In this emergency, the bright idea of a fancy fair suggested itself to some inventive female mind, and the proposition was taken up with enthusiasm. Fancy fairs often produce a great deal of money, and those shy capitalists who would recoil from the naked horror of a subscription list, like fish from a bare hook, are not always averse to buy guinea nothings and five-guinea trifles when there is a good band of music, a decorated tent, and, above all, when the shopwoman of the hour is an attractive girl of the highest lineage procurable. This last, in the present case, was the difficulty. Contributors of elegant inutilities were as plenty as blackberries ; good stall-keepers were rare.

And there was another reason why Mrs Dibbs was peculiarly anxious to net great profits from

the charitable, one of those reasons which perpetually occur to complicate the machinery of human action. Mrs Dibbs, who had naturally taken one half of the stalls under the shelter of her matronly wing, was jealous of the dean, and of Sophronia his wife, and wanted to eclipse their good works.

Was there ever a dean, I wonder, who got on quite well with his bishop ? Not at Slochester, at any rate. In that ecclesiastical city, the dean and the bishop were looked upon as the white and black kings at chess, as fire and water, as the First Lord of Her Majesty's Treasury and the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. The dean, within the precincts, was by far the more popular. All the canons, the prebendaries, the precentor, every one who ate the cathedral's bread and drank the cathedral's port, stuck to the dean in fair weather and foul. But the secular clergy, the incumbents of the town churches, the country vicars, the rural deans, adhered to the bishop with equal zeal. There was much debatable ground in the shape of power between those two churchmen. There was chronic though mild war between palace and deanery.

Mrs Dibbs had not been very long at the palace, but she was as zealous in the feud as if she had been born within hearing of the great bell of Slochester. She was not a humble woman ; indeed, though a good soul in the main, she was of a pugnacious and self-asserting turn ; but we ought to deal gently with the wives of bishops, remembering that the world deals harshly with them. It must be very hard, certainly, to live in a palace, and have for one's husband a spiritual peer of this realm, and mix with the great of the earth, yet be Mrs Dibbs still—plain Mrs Dibbs, as the washerwoman is plain Mrs Brown. If society, refusing to say 'My lady' where the husband is called 'My lord,' would only be considerate enough to address its notes, its bills, circulars, and so forth, to the Right Reverend Mrs Dibbs, that would be something. But no ; the wife of a bishop's bosom is unrecognised by the Herald's College. None the less, however, did Mrs Dibbs defend her right of professional superiority. In this matter of the repairs, his lordship had given five hundred pounds—no small slice out of his nominal five thousand, and he had winced as he signed the cheque—but the dean out of his savings had given as much, and had got twice as much credit for his liberality. It was the more necessary to outshine the enemy on the occasion of the fancy fair, and for this purpose Mrs Dibbs had reckoned on her kind new friend, Lady Mortlake.

If the Ladies Caroline and Julia would be so good as to condescend to stand behind the counter for two or three hours, surely all would go well. They were fine comely young women—thus ran the thoughts of the lady of the palace—but their main merit was in their rank. Over their stalls, metaphorically speaking, would float the banner of all the Clares, the field gules and the falcon armed and plumed or, that had figured gallantly on shield and knightly pennon in the old wars of the Edwards and Henries. There was only one house in the county fit to vie with Harbledown. The spending public of Slochester and its vicinity would make liberal purchases when the sellers were an earl's daughters.

But to the infinite chagrin of Mrs Dibbs, the

Ladies Caroline and Julia said No, and no amount of pressing could make them say Yes. It was not in their line, they said. The style of thing suited some people, but they had tried it; and not even to restore the Yellowboys' window, not even to mend St Mungo, or the Crump effigy, or even to repair the central tower, would they do it again. In truth, the Ladies Caroline and Julia were not fit for work of that sort. They were kind creatures; not lazy, not haughty. They were heartily willing to help the good cause. Julia was hard at work on a large screen, Caroline was painting a pair of fans. Both sisters had spent a large part of their allowance in purchasing fancy articles for the fair. But they would not keep stalls. Tiresome men, they declared, expected stall-keepers to have wit and repartee at command, to keep up a constant fire of crackling jokes, and to smile incessantly at every coxcomb who might affect to cheapen a pen-wiper. It was as cruel a tax on the mind as the acting of charades. It was a bore. The Ladies Caroline and Julia said No, and the countess did not attempt to make them say anything else.

'What on earth are we to do?' asked rueful Mrs Dibbs.

'You will take a stall yourself,' said the Countess of Mortlake.

Yes, Mrs Dibbs would take a stall herself; but though she was sure of absorbing the enforced half-crowns of a great many curates, and the sovereigns of many rectors, it would never do to trust to one successful stall alone. And Miss Billingsley shook her head laughingly at the suggestion that she should preside over a counter; declaring with great good-humour that her ugly face would frighten people away, though she could do some service as a whipper-in. But saleswomen must be had.

'There's Mrs Bangham,' was the first suggestion. 'Odious creature. I wonder she has the impudence to shew her face in such a place for such a purpose; but I understand she belongs to the deanery half of the fair already,' austere remarked Mrs Dibbs.

'There's Mrs Faddleton, a very pretty woman,' said Miss Plummington.

And though Mrs Dibbs made a wry face at the name of Mrs Captain Faddleton, wife of a raffish ex-officer of the Hussars, and whose ponies, and French finery, and French manners somewhat scandalised Slochester, it was agreed that fair-haired little Mrs Faddleton should have the offer of a stall.

The countess suggested Miss Compton.

'I have asked her,' was the reply of Mrs Dibbs; 'but Lady Compton won't let her keep a stall.'

Two ladies who had not yet spoken now brought forward their candidates: 'There's Miss Cooper.'

'She is laid up with influenza, and besides, she's such a fright, poor dear,' returned the bishop's wife.

'There's Blanche Pender,' was the next suggestion.

'Yes, but she's so silly. She would miscall everything, and very likely give sovereigns in change by mistake for shillings. But there's the cake-stall, to be sure: yes, I think even Blanche might attend to that,' said Mrs Dibbs thoughtfully. And it was settled that Miss Blanche Pender's intellect was capable of grasping the distinction between raspberry-jam puffs and cherry-brandy. Then came a quick fire of question and answer.

'Miss Watkins—Emma, I mean, not the eldest?'

'A country banker's daughter, my dear, and niece to Pluckley the veterinary surgeon! That would never, never do!' and Mrs Dibbs, whose grandpapa had filled the useful office of head-cook to Merton College, Oxford, shuddered at the notion of calling in so plebeian an auxiliary as Emma Watkins.

'One of the Rawlinsons? They are all pretty.'

'Yes, but they are going immediately to Nice. The second girl is consumptive.'

'Miss Violet Vavasour?'

'She is booked for a stall already. The deanery people snapped her up at once. And it is such a pity; for she is sure to draw customers by the hundred; and I'm sure dear Violet would rather have been on my side of the room, only she had promised them,' said Mrs Dibbs with unconscious egotism.

'I can shew you where to find something prettier even than Violet Vavasour. Look there—out of that window!' said Miss Billingsley, pointing to the merry group that now drew near the house, and to the beautiful girl, who fell into fifty graceful attitudes as she directed their sports.

'Lady Flavia Clare! Dear me, how stupid I was not to have remembered her before,' said Mrs Dibbs naively. 'But do you think, dear Lady Mortlake, that—that she would like?'

The countess took a minute or two to consider the matter. 'I do not know what she would say,' was her answer; 'she is very young, you see.'

'But if you don't object?' pleaded Mrs Dibbs; and the Ladies Caroline and Julia at once protested that the idea was a charming one. Lady Mortlake had no intention of opposing her veto to the general wish, for already there was a chorus of rejoicing over the discovery of so high-born and attractive a recruit. But she really did not know how her young cousin might take the proposal. To sell penwipers, and fly-traps, and photographs for vulgar coin to motley strangers, might suggest degrading associations to Lady Flavia's mind, for aught the countess knew. It seemed to her like asking a princess to bare her white arms for the purpose of manipulating dough into a pudding-crust, or even into those famous unpeppered cream-tarts of Arabian story; a proposition that might be accepted with delight or rejected with anger, according to the fancy of the moment. However, she tapped at the window with the handle of her parasol, and smilingly beckoned to Lady Flavia to come in.

Lady Flavia came in, surrounded by two or three of the younger children, who clung to her skirts, and would not leave her. Her sweet face was a little flushed, or, at anyrate, its delicate bloom was heightened, and her eyes sparkled; and with her flowing curls and animated look, she was lovely indeed. To the delight of Mrs Dibbs, she readily agreed to take a stall at the approaching fair.

'Thank you for thinking of me!' she cried, in her simple way; and she laughed with childlike enjoyment at the prospect, as she said, of selling real things across a real counter for real gold and silver, and was wonderfully winning and sprightly, bringing more smiles to the faces of those fearfully-wise matrons and spinsters than often beamed there.

So, after lunch, when the countess's carriage had driven off, and Miss Billingsley was tying her bonnet-strings, she said, by way of leave-taking: 'There, dear Mrs Dibbs—I don't think, even with Violet Vavasour to help them, that the deanery people will cut you out now.'

And Mrs Dibbs replied with genuine warmth, that Lady Flavia was 'a sweet darling little thing—more like an angel than anything else, if it wasn't wrong to say so.'

Meanwhile the angel who formed the subject of Mrs Dibbs's eulogies was rolling rapidly homewards. The post, thanks to some casualty that would furnish an 'alarming accident' to the daily papers that delight to treat of shuntings, and sidings, and point-switchings, was late. Lord Mortlake was at home, and was just unlocking the post-bag as the countess and the three girls arrived. The opening of the post-bag, and the distribution of the family correspondence, is an engrossing and delightful occupation to many and many a Paterfamilias; so it was to the earl. He did his sorting gently, like an elderly Ariel; but he looked twice at every letter before he let it out of his custody.

'Eh, eh!' said the earl; 'Miss Stockings—who's Miss Stockings? One of the maids, eh? Lady Mortlake—one, two, three; and one for Julia; five newspapers; a letter for Benson; one for Robert Brown—who's he? Oh, the new stable-helper, is he? And, Flavia, there is one for you. You don't give me much trouble in letter-sorting in general, missy.' And the good-natured old gentleman held out the letter, and placed it in Lady Flavia's gloved hand. What he said was perfectly true. The late earl's daughter, as was but natural on account of her secluded youth, had very few to write to her. She took her letter into the little hand that wore Number Six of Houbigant's gloves; hands such as nobody else possessed, gloves such as nobody else inquired for, in all the county. She went straight upstairs with it, nor did she open it until, half mechanically as it would seem, she had closed and locked the door of her room. She eyed the letter with a kind of wondering curiosity, and laughingly said, as she broke the seal: 'Who can have written to me—to me, to whom no one writes.' But from the moment that her eyes fell on the first lines of the letter, a change came over her fair face; the smile died away on her lips, a strange terror-stricken look was in her eyes, and her cheek grew paler as she read on. She looked then as she had done on that first night beneath the roof of Harbledown, months before, when she had watched while others were sleeping. The shadow of a Fear was upon her; and yet there seemed no cause for such agitation in the letter before her. It was surely a very kind and affectionate little letter, and it ran thus:

'MY OWN DEAREST FLAVIA—Do you remember, love, when you and I used to talk in our little room at the convent, looking down upon the great wood-pile and that noisy *basse-cour*, where old Marguerite did her best to keep order among the hens—do you remember, I say, how we two used to look forward to our meeting in the great world outside the gates? We used to think, I remember, that life outside would be all one long holiday, with no lessons, no piano-practice, no "il faut être sage, Mademoiselle," from that weary Sister Agnes, or from the good stiff old Dame Supérieure. Well,

dear, that happy time has come now. It came to you earlier, though I ought not to call *that* happy, as you only left us, darling, to go to the death-bed of your poor papa; and I assure you I lay awake, night after night, thinking of you, and how strange and sad everything must be to you in England, and how melancholy that great grand house must be, when you found none but strangers to welcome you. Many a night I have waked up, and spoken to you between sleeping and waking, and felt so sad and deserted to find your little bed empty, dear, and nobody in the room but poor lonely me. I hope you won't think me selfish, dearest, but I was so sad, and so forlorn, when you were gone, and I was left the only English girl, the only Protestant, in all the dreary place. I never liked it, you know, but then I did not come to Grènez when I was quite little, as you did. But there, dear child, it's quite over now; and I am so pleased to be on English ground again, and to have done with school for ever. My papa, Colonel Ford, has come back from India for ever! O Flavia! how I wish you could see him; he is the kindest, best, most generous of all the fathers in the world, and quite spoils me. He says he has to be father and mother too to me, and indeed his care and goodness are beyond all praise. And I am so happy now. But, dearest, one thing is wanting to my happiness, and that is the sight of your sweet face, and the assurance that you love your little Amy still. You know we two are to be friends *always*. Have you forgotten what plans we made for the future, and what famous *châteaux en Espagne* we built. I hate writing, and yet I can hardly stop my pen; but I hear papa calling me, for we are to go to some sight or other. Where can we meet, dear? We are in London now, in lodgings, in Minden Street, St James's, Number seventeen; but soon we are to take a house in the country; though I think I like London best. No more time. Mind you write soon, if only one line. You are a lazy puss, not to have written before. I *must* go; so with dear kind love and kisses to my own, own darling, ever her affectionate friend,

AMY FORD.'

Lady Flavia Clare read this letter over twice, and then yet a third time, and then the hand that held the paper dropped to her side; and as she sat in the great arm-chair gazing dreamily at the fire, her whole attitude expressed weary, hopeless discouragement. Minutes went by, and formed themselves into hours; the hands of the clock travelled along the dial-plate; the dark November afternoon became a dusky November evening, and still the mistress of the pretty pink rooms sat silently brooding over the fire, with the letter in her hand. After a long, long time she rose, tore the letter to fragments, tossed the scraps of paper into the fire, and with a sort of fierce intentness, watched them shrivel, and scorch, and blacken, and so vanish into nothingness. Then she gave a long sigh, and turned sadly away.

'It must come to an end at last,' she said; 'but when, and how?' And she sat down in her old place, and remained motionless, with her eyes on the fire, until her maid tapped at the door, and the dressing-bell rang. Lady Flavia rose and unlocked the door, and in the act of doing so, the beauty and candour of her bright young face seemed to return like those of the witch-maiden in *Christabel*. Simmons, observant as she was, saw not a trace of emotion in her lady's face as she busied herself

in her duties. And when the earl's ward appeared at dinner, her loveliness had lost none of its charms; her spirits were high; she was the same fairy creature that since they first knew her had been the life and soul of the Harbledown household.

THE COURT OF CHANCERY.

If you see an old mansion in a sadly-dilapidated state, with broken windows, rusty railings, a garden full of weeds, and with a generally 'seedy' appearance, you will, in nine cases out of ten, be sure to learn from the 'oldest inhabitant,' or some equally good authority in the neighbourhood, that the place is in Chancery. Those houses on Snow Hill, and at the corner of Stamford Street, on the Surrey side of Blackfriars Bridge, which for a number of years have been untenanted, dirty, and paneless, through the caprice of their owner, are not only supposed to be haunted by ghosts, but thrown entirely and irretrievably into Chancery; and when once there, it is the popular belief of a 'generous and enlightened public' that they remain there for an indefinite period, or, at all events, until the property is sweated away with costs. 'As long as a Chancery suit' is a proverbial expression; and an enterprising tailor in the neighbourhood of the 'Lane' (as Chancery Lane is familiarly called), and in the midst of the legal world, has christened his clothes that won't wear out 'the three-guinea Chancery suit.' Novelists and dramatists have, time out of mind, made use of the Court of Chancery, and describe all the proceedings therein as being lengthy and ruinous—every suit a Jarndyce and Jarndyce. There are thousands of honest folks who believe that getting into Chancery is only a single remove from the Bankruptcy Court; and even the followers of the noble art of self-defence—the members of the pugilistic ring—men who have ransacked the languages of Great Britain and the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America (and Romsey Marsh, as the shade of Mr Barham suggests), for choice expressions and appropriate similes, have characteristically declared that the greatest calamity, short of absolute and utter defeat, which can befall a pugilist, is that of getting his head into Chancery. In short, there is no denying the fact, that Her Majesty's High Court of Chancery has fallen very low in the estimation of the British public—a result arising partly from ignorance, and partly from misconception of what the business of the Court really is. When they hear that the suit of *Smith v. Brown* is in its twentieth year, they lift up their hands with amazement; and the announcement that the Marquis of Boot has been made a ward of court, makes them exclaim: 'Heaven help the poor lad.' If you, sensible reader, wish to become a little acquainted (in a quiet, harmless, and inexpensive way) with this *bête noir*—this legal Dragon of Wantley—you might do worse than read the following observations concerning it:

The Court of Chancery has a very extensive jurisdiction. Nothing is too large or too small for its powers. It will deal with an estate of priceless value, or enter into the merits and composition of a patent medicine. It will, with equal readiness, discuss the authorship of a burlesque extravaganza, or the tenets of Johanna Southcote. At one time, it may be seen investigating a point of international law, and at another, the patent right of a champagne

corkscrew. A Vice-chancellor's court, which on Monday was drowsy with contingent remainders and the cypres doctrine, will on Tuesday be alive with sewing-machines and crinoline ribs. The Master of the Rolls, who, in the morning, was up to the ears in a great railway case, will perhaps, in the afternoon, be fixing the amount of young Lord Fortunio's pocket-money while at Eton, and the place where he is to spend his holidays, or pondering over the eligibility of a match between Tom Wildrake of the 'Blues' and a ward of court with a pretty face and a fortune in the Three-per-Cents. Some thousands of pounds have been spent over the question of capsules for wine-bottles, and a tolerable fortune has recently been absorbed by paraffine oil. Pins and needles, dyes, sensation dramas (the *Colleen Bawn*, for instance), umbrellas, life-pills, musical instruments, three-volumed novels, Eau de Cologne, and ballet-dancers, all come at times within the dealings of the great Court.

A very large portion of the business of the Court is provided by wills. In the majority of cases, where testators make their own wills, or have them prepared by incompetent persons, they unconsciously provide food for the lawyers. To save a few pounds in his lifetime, a testator will often deprive his children and legatees of hundreds after his death. It is an old saying and a very true one, that the village schoolmaster and the parish clerk are the lawyers' best friends. Nearly every one thinks himself competent to draw a will, a document which requires more skill and caution in its preparation than any other that could be named. Even lawyers themselves who draw their own wills often make mistakes. Sir Samuel Romilly's will was improperly worded, and that of Chief Baron Thompson the subject of Chancery proceedings. The will of Bradley the celebrated conveyancer, a man who spent all his life in drawing other people's wills, was set aside by Lord Thurlow for uncertainty; and a late learned Master in Chancery directed the proceeds of his estate to be invested in consols in his own name! Not long ago, an application had to be made to the Probate Court in consequence of a testator having supposed that the word executrix was the plural of executor—the same individual, by the way, talked of 'provoking' all former wills! In another case, a man left some property to his nephew John, when he had two nephews of that name, and a suit in Chancery was instituted for the purpose of ascertaining which of the nephews the testator meant to benefit; and 'once upon a time,' a country attorney, who had, perhaps, a spite against his relations, left eleven hundred pounds to three gentlemen, his executors, to appropriate eight hundred pounds 'as they might think proper;' for which arduous task he bequeathed them one hundred pounds each. 'Wills,' said Lord Coke, 'and the construction of them, do more perplex a man than any other, and to make a certain construction of them exceedeth *jurisprudendum artem*.'

Another portion of the business of the Court is granting injunctions to restrain the commission of threatened injuries; such as, for instance, the breach of patent or copyright laws. If a rival publisher advertises a cheap edition of your famous novel, you can obtain an injunction to prevent its publication; and if a dishonest tradesman makes use of your trade-mark, you have your remedy against

him by applying to the Court. If the tenant for life of your family estate threatens to cut down all the timber into firewood, he may be restrained by an order of the Court; and if a speculative builder shews any intention of blocking up your 'ancient lights,' you may put a stop to his misdeeds by injunction. A court of common law can only give you damages for an injury you have actually suffered; while the Court of Chancery can prevent the injury itself from being committed. Then, again, if you have bargained to sell your estate to Brown, and Brown afterwards refuses to fulfil his agreement, the Court of Chancery will make him fulfil it; while at common law, your only remedy is an action for damages for the breach of contract. If you die without a will, leaving a large property and an heir-at-law of tender years, the Court of Chancery, acting for the sovereign, who is *pater patriæ*, will take care both of the property and the infant; appoint the latter a suitable guardian; will see that he is properly brought up in the way he should go, according to his means; will not allow the ward, if a female, to make an unsuitable marriage; and where the Court has reason to believe that an improvident marriage is on the tapis, and without its sanction, will not only interdict the marriage, but also forbid all communication between the ward and the admirer. In fact, the Court will be a father to an orphan, providing the same has property. If the orphan has none, the Court will not interfere, for in that case, as the law-books laconically inform us, 'the Court cannot then beneficially exercise its powers.' The Court will also take care of idiots and lunatics who have no other guardian; in fact, the Court will see after all those who are unable to take care of themselves; provided always, of course, they have got any property.

The Court will also compel a partition of property to which two or more are entitled. Suppose you give one horse to your two sons, each would be entitled to enjoy a moiety of the whole animal; and in case of disagreement, your sons might be very awkwardly fixed; so the Court would, on application, direct the horse to be sold, and the proceeds be divided between your two sons. A curious instance of the difficulties experienced in the joint-ownership of an animal is mentioned in an American story. Two men are tenants in common of an elephant, and one declines either to pay anything to the other in the shape of profits of exhibition, or to buy his co-owner's share, and is at last brought to reason by the threat of the injured party to shoot his undivided moiety. If a house becomes the subject of a Chancery suit, the Court will not allow it to go to rack and ruin, as popular novelists would have us believe, but will see that it is properly tenanted and kept in repair, or will know the reason why. The novelists' house in Chancery, which is tenanted only by bats and starlings, if it ever existed, is, at all events, nowhere to be seen at the present day.

The Court of Chancery will also grant relief in the case of forfeited bonds. Suppose you give Brown a bond for one thousand pounds on Christmas-day under a penalty of two thousand pounds, and you neglect to pay the first-named amount at the time specified, your bond is at law forfeited, and the penalty attaches; but the Court of Chancery looks to the spirit, and not the strict letter of the bond, and will relieve you from the for-

feiture on payment of the thousand pounds and interest; and, as has been observed by a learned writer, if the scene of the *Merchant of Venice* had been laid in England instead of Venice, Antonio and his friends would have been spared a considerable amount of trouble and anxiety, as the proper advice for Portia to have given would have been for Antonio to instruct his solicitor to file a bill in Chancery, to relieve him from the penalty of the bond, upon the payment of the three thousand ducats, with legal interest; and the Court would have made a decree accordingly.

A very large portion of the business of the Court of Chancery is administrative, and not litigious. It will undertake the administration of deceased persons' estates, discharge their liabilities, collect their debts, and then, after paying the costs of the administration, will divide the balance among the parties entitled. It will settle partnership accounts; wind up insolvent joint-stock companies; has full power over trustees, to whom it will give advice when necessary, and relieve them from many of their responsibilities. We might fill pages with a catalogue of what the Court of Chancery will do, for starting out with the broad principle, that there is no right without a remedy for its invasion, it strives to bring home justice to every man's door. The Court of Chancery is a court of equity, and equity in its most general sense is synonymous with natural justice. We have, however, we think, mentioned enough to shew the general business and utility of the Court. We have purposely omitted mentioning the reasons why we should have both courts of law and a court of equity, whose decisions occasionally clash against one another, because such a subject is not only intricate in itself, but would occupy more space than we can spare.

Until 1813, the only judges of the Court of Chancery were the Lord Chancellor and the Master of the Rolls; and what with the amount of business, and the 'doubting' propensities of the learned lord who then held the Great Seal, they were utterly unable to get through the work laid before them; and arrears had so much increased, especially in appeals to the House of Lords, that a third judge, a Vice-chancellor, was appointed. Business, however, still increasing, two new Vice-chancellors were appointed in 1841, and the salaries of the three Vice-chancellors fixed at five thousand pounds a year each. Suitors dissatisfied with the decisions of the Master of the Rolls, or one of the Vice-chancellors, had a right of appeal to the Lord Chancellor; but as that learned functionary was necessarily obliged to devote much of his time to the appeals in the House of Lords, arrears accumulated so much that, in 1851, the Appellate Court was strengthened by the appointment of two Lords-justices. As a rule, the Lords-justices do not sit with the Lord Chancellor, but hold separate courts of appeal in Lincoln's Inn; but whenever a case of extraordinary importance comes before the Appellate Court, the three judges sit together. From the decisions of the Appellate Court, a further appeal may, in certain cases, be made to the House of Lords. The jurisdictions of the Master of the Rolls and the three Vice-chancellors are very nearly although not quite alike; the Master of the Rolls, however, is the highest in point of rank, and is the only judge who may be a member of the House of Commons.

Let us now have a glance at the inside of this terrible Court. Let us enter that of the Lord Chancellor. We push through a couple of inconveniently narrow doors, knock our heads against a heavy curtain, make a dive, and then, like the clown in the pantomime, 'here we are' in court—a square, dismal-looking room, something between a chapel and a prison. On a bench, sitting in an arm-chair, with his legs under a red baize-covered table, sits the Right Honourable Richard Baron Westbury of Westbury, in the county of Wilts, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain; the highest temporal lord in the United Kingdom; the prescriptive prolocutor of the House of Lords; keeper of the Queen's conscience; the patron of numerous livings; the appointer of all the justices of the peace in the kingdom; the guardian of infants, idiots, and lunatics; the head of the Court of Chancery; and the recipient of an income of ten thousand pounds a year. On a table beneath the bench, also covered with red baize, are lying *perdu* in quiet state and splendour His Lordship's insignia of office, the gorgeous mace and the monstrous purse. If the latter contains the Great Seal, then the Great Seal must be a very small one, as the purse itself, although of Brobdingnagian make, so far as length and breadth are concerned, and of about the same build as a freemason's apron, has very little thickness, nay, is as flat as a pancake. The great Mr Cuteman is addressing the Court, the learned gentleman being surrounded by heavy bundles of paper, which are voluminous if not luminous. His speech is not lively, nor is his subject interesting; from the little we can hear, he is talking about colourable appointments and executory devises, subjects anything but exciting or interesting, except to the parties concerned; in fact, we may remark, that in spite of all the great variety of subjects which come within the dealings of the Courts of Chancery, the courts themselves are anything but lively and interesting to a lay-spectator. You will not hear there any fervid addresses to a 'highly-intellectual and impartial jury,' or see Serjeant X. wipe away imaginary tears from his eyes in the hopes of getting a verdict. You cannot there listen to the forensic attempt of Serjeant Y. to make his client appear as innocent as a new-born babe, although every one believes him to be the veriest varlet that ever stood in a dock. No ill-used maiden, all forlorn, comes to the Court of Chancery for a pecuniary salve for her blighted hopes; and it is but rare that an exciting case of circumstantial evidence comes into Lincoln's Inn. No, for such things you must search elsewhere—the Assize Courts and the Old Bailey. At times, sensation cases come before the Court; but, as a rule, all the proceedings therein are 'of no public interest.'

In each court, underneath the judge, you will see a gentleman in a wig and gown, with a large note-book before him. He is one of the Registrars of the Court, whose principal duty is to take notes of the judge's decisions and orders, and afterwards to formally draw up the same. To each Vice-chancellor and to the Master of the Rolls are attached two chief-clerks, who transact in the judge's chambers the routine business and detail parts of the suits, such as taking accounts, proving debts, making inquiries, and the like. The chief-clerks are necessarily a shrewd and business-like class of men, and have mostly been solicitors

in good practice. Then there is the Accountant-general, who is a very important officer of the Court, although of somewhat recent introduction. His duty is to receive and pay money belonging to suitors under the direction and orders of the Court. Some idea of the amount of business transacted in this department may be obtained when we mention the fact, that during the last legal year, the Accountant-general received the enormous sum of £17,202,895 paid into court, and paid out, by no less than 43,565 cheques, the sum of £15,672,509, and that he had to keep with the Bank of England (where the moneys are invested) upwards of twenty-five thousand different accounts; it has been estimated that the total value of the property in the custody or under the control of the Court of Chancery is between fifty and sixty millions sterling.

Chancery barristers consist of Queen's Counsel and members of the outer or junior bar. Serjeants-at-law are never, or but very rarely, seen at the Chancery bar; and when a Chancery barrister is made a Queen's Counsel, he attaches himself to one particular court of one of the Vice-chancellors, or the Master of the Rolls, and will not go into any other court of equal standing without a special retainer. This is a very convenient method for the public, inasmuch as there is always a tolerable certainty of having your Queen's Counsel when you have paid for him, a practice which might be very advantageously adopted by the courts of common law. The junior bar, of course, makes no such selection. It is more difficult for a young barrister to make way in a Court of Chancery than in a common-law court. He has no opportunities of displaying his oratorical abilities before a jury and solicitors; and the cases heard in Chancery Courts being far less interesting to the general public than actions at law, the Chancery man has but few opportunities of appearing in print. He does not go on circuit, but must stop in the region of Chancery Lane. He must wait in his chambers until a solicitor comes to him. He cannot pick up business in court—he cannot find there 'promiscuous' briefs—in fact, without the acquaintance of a solicitor, he might just as well have his wig and gown and chambers in the middle of the Desert of Sahara. We should mention here that there are now jury causes in the Courts of Chancery, but they are by no means numerous—there were only six during the last legal year—and then in such cases it is usual, and certainly advisable, to obtain the assistance of a common-law barrister, who knows something about examining and cross-examining witnesses, and how to address a jury—matters with which Chancery men are altogether unacquainted. Many Chancery men are also conveyancers, while others will not take conveyancing business, and some conveyancers will not go into court; that is, of course, among the well employed, for the rest are not so nice, but take whatever they can get. There are plenty of Chancery barristers who pass through life without ever having had a brief, and dozens of conveyancers who have never earned a guinea by their profession.

We must not omit to mention the solicitors who are also officers of the Court, and many of whom are commissioners to administer oaths in Chancery; appointments obtained by an almost formal application, and made rather for the convenience of the public than for the emolument of the profession.

Until recently, these commissioners were known to the world under the high-sounding title of 'Masters Extraordinary in Chancery;' and it is related of a very 'cute' solicitor that he had placed on his passport when going abroad, 'Maitre extraordinaire de la Chancellerie de la Reine d'Angleterre;' an addition which caused him to be received with the greatest courtesy and marks of respect by the officials and authorities of the countries through which he travelled.

There is no disguising the fact, that proceedings in Chancery are very expensive luxuries, and ought to be avoided whenever possible. We have known cases where large estates have been eaten away with costs, where legacies of large amount have been sweated down through the ignorance of a testator or the obstinacy of a legatee. A couple of years ago, a fight took place in Court between five distinct classes of people, as to which was entitled to a certain legacy of a thousand pounds. The fight was fierce, and occupied nine months; at the end of which time, the Court decided in favour of a certain class, and directed the costs of the suit to be paid out of the legacy. The costs were taxed and paid, and the balance was handed over to the successful party—it was under ninety pounds. But this was an exceptional case; and the costs would not have been more had the legacy been a million instead of a thousand. One of the most extraordinary instances of how litigation can melt away large sums of money is that given by Mr Thelluson's will, which was made towards the end of the last century. The testator directed the income of his property to be accumulated during the lives of all his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who were living at the time of his death, for the benefit of some future descendants to be living at the death of the survivor. The property which the testator left was worth then about six hundred thousand pounds; and an eminent actuary estimated the property and its accumulated income would, when it became payable, reach the enormous amount of upwards of twenty-three million pounds. But this enormous sum was destined for other purposes, for shortly after the testator's death, Chancery proceedings commenced, and continued for a number of years; and the enormous accumulation once anticipated, which seemed almost to threaten the equipoise of the state itself, vanished in Chancery costs and management. It has been jocosely remarked, that proceedings in Chancery begin with a bill and end with a bill; and it is said of a young gentleman undergoing his examination at the Law Institution, previous to his being admitted a solicitor, that when asked what was the first step to be taken in a suit in Chancery, replied: 'Ask for a cheque on account.' It is impossible to give any correct idea of the costs of Chancery proceedings, for they entirely depend upon the nature and intricacy of the business transacted, the number of parties to the suit, &c. Sometimes a dozen solicitors and their counsel will be employed in one suit; while in others of a friendly character, one solicitor may represent both plaintiff and defendant. A solicitor is not at liberty to charge what he pleases for the business he transacts, but is bound down by a certain scale of fees; and his bill of costs is in many cases moderated, or taxed, by an officer of the court, called the Taxing-master, who certifies the amount due to the solicitor whose

bill has been taxed. During the last legal year, upwards of seven thousand bills of costs were so taxed—the average amount of each bill of costs when taxed being one hundred and four pounds. It has been said that Chancery suits are unduly prolonged, or nursed, an accusation against the profession easier made than proved. Some suits last only a few weeks, while others necessarily attain a great longevity. For instance, Chancery suits for the administration of property given by a testator to half-a-dozen children for their lives, and after their deaths, to their children at twenty-one, cannot be completed until all the testators' children are dead, and their children attain the requisite age; so that, as has been observed by a learned writer, such suits have been represented as owing their vitality not to the happy health of the tenants for life, whose property has been well taken care of, but to the careless indolence or perverse ingenuity of judge, counsel, solicitors, and officers of the Court. In Lord Eldon's time, there were no doubt great and vexatious delays; but when the doubting Chancellor gave up the Great Seal, an era of reformation set in; and now, many of the old notions and stumbling-blocks are swept away. Enormous delays such as we read of in novels no longer exist; and while the business of the Court has increased immensely during the last half-century, the number of arrears are proportionately very much less than formerly. The Chancery cobwebs have been nearly all swept away, and the reformation is still going on. Very little grumbling is now made against this famous Court, notwithstanding that there are at present in court between sixty and seventy thousand sets of proceedings, a fourth of which are regular suits.

BURIED IN THE DEEP.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAP. III.

I LEFT my patient quickly, for illness was marching upon me with rapid strides; I fastened the doors as she had desired, and crept into my cabin. I remember little more: the fury of the winds, the demon-like noises of the ship, the fierce throbs in my brain, the awful consciousness of coming delirium, the terrible confusion, in which nothing was distinct but pain—all these things came upon me, and were too strong for me. I knew I was attended by kind hands; and when Dr Alexander held a cup of medicine to my lips, I knew that he was far gone in intoxication; and beginning to wonder why it was that I, losing the sense of everything so rapidly, even of my own identity, should be able to notice that, I lost all power of wonder and knowledge. I cannot tell how the hours had worn, when this dream came to the fever-sleep which had fallen upon me, and which held my limbs in a gripe of motionless pain, and pressed with crushing weight upon my head. The dream allowed me to hear the storm, to know that men overhead were combating the elements with weapons of skill and strength; that the ship was labouring and reeling; and that, had I been capable of reasoning, I must have been afraid. Then the dream shewed me this—the glimmer of a small wax-taper near my bed, yet only at the door of my cabin—it came nearer—I closed my eyes as I dreamed, but the feverish acuteness of my senses shewed me a man's dim figure through the gloom. I tried to say: 'Doctor, is it you?'

but no sound came from my lips. Then I heard a slight click, as though something metallic had struck the side of my cot, and the figure moved away. Then the hook which held the door back was let go, and the door was shut and locked. Then the terror of the dream gave me strength, and I strove to rise, and did rise; but a sudden lurch of the ship struck me back, and the dream changed to insensibility.

What was that noise which rose above the sound of the wind, fallen indeed, but angry, and drowned it by its shrill fierce terror? Whence came that shriek, which rent away the curtain of sleep from before my eyes, and drove the delusions of fever far from my brain? A shriek which brought me upright upon my feet like a shock of galvanism, and flung me against the locked door, shrieking louder than itself that I might be let out to see its horrible meaning. I never knew who uttered it; I never knew who burst open the door of my cabin; I never knew who flung a shawl round me, and held me fast, while the consciousness of the truth blasted my eyes, and pierced my heart. They had burst open her cabin door, the door which I had hooked back at her own request, but which had been found locked in the morning. In the centre of the floor stood an open chest, a mere heap of ruins; everything it contained had been cut to pieces. The box in which I had placed her jewels was shattered, and its contents were flung about the floor. The sheets, the blankets, and the pillow-cases of the cot were torn into fragments, and amid them she lay, or rather crouched. She, did I say, Helen Stamer? No; a horrible object lay there, which had been her. Fallen forward in a heap, her head hanging over the side of the cot, and both arms pendent, face and arms alike hidden in the waves of hair, which had glowed round her beauty like an aureola when I had seen her last, she lay. For a moment, I did not comprehend the meaning of the scene; the next, I saw that a sullen pool of crimson blood steeped the floor, and the fragments, and the listless hands, and the pendent hair. The air seemed full of blood all round me. I gasped and raved, and strove with some one who was trying to hold me; I heard a sound of winds and waves, and voices, and some horrid convulsive laughter—surely it was not mine. I saw them lift up the head, I saw a scarlet gash in the white flesh. I saw dead staring eyes, and then, then—God be praised!—I saw nothing, and heard nothing, and all the dreadful world was blotted from my knowledge.

Seven weeks, during which I had hovered between life and death, in all the varied yet continuous suffering of fever, had followed my removal from the *Southern Cross* to my brother's house at Woodside. I was now convalescent; and with my slowly-returning health, the power to govern, concentrate, and arrange my thoughts, was restored to me. I had arrived at a general comprehension of the events which had ensued on the termination of our voyage. I had learned as much of my own illness as my sister-in-law considered it wise to impart to me, and, in particular, I had heard with grateful pleasure that Dr Alexander had been untiring in his kindness—visiting me daily during my long illness, and displaying the utmost solicitude in its progress, and anxiety for its result. He had refrained from coming into my presence

since I had been restored to my senses, from apprehension of the effect which the sight of him might have had upon me, in recalling associations which it had been most necessary to forget; but he had now no further reason for delay, and desired to see me. Nothing could any longer avail to repress thought or to suppress memory. He considered with justice that the wiser course would be to aid both, and he had written to me to request an interview on a certain day in January 1861.

My sister-in-law, Mrs James Henderson, is an excellent woman. To strength of mind she unites gentleness of heart, just as her tall stature and amplitude of figure are softened by the refinement of her features, and the musical tones of her voice. From the moment in which I became conscious that I was in her house and under her care, I knew that all personal anxiety would be misplaced. I rested like a child, oblivious of yesterday, unapprehensive for to-morrow. But this peaceful interval had gone by now, and my mind had awakened to a comprehension of its task, and was acquiring the power of fulfilling it.

One o'clock was the hour named for Dr Alexander's visit, and when it struck, I was prepared to receive him. Mrs Henderson had assisted me to rise, and make the simple toilet which suited my invalid condition, and, with true tact, and the good sense which distinguishes her, she had neither made very much of the visit I was expecting, nor did she affect to disregard it. No allusion to the awful cause of my illness had ever escaped her, and I acquiesced in this reserve, partly from a conviction of its wisdom, and partly from a physical inability to enter upon, or, indeed, approach the subject in words, which exclusively occupied my thoughts. Mrs Henderson left my room as Dr Alexander knocked at the hall-door, and I had only the interval occupied by his speaking a few words to her on the lower landing, and coming rapidly up the staircase, in which to arrange my thoughts, for the last time, when he entered the room. At the first sight of his face, all the past rushed upon me with an intensity with which not all the thought I had bestowed upon it had invested it. A faint, cold thrill passed over me, and a film came across my eyes; but as he came quickly towards me, took my hand, and inquired after my health, his thoroughly professional tone restored my composure at once. I had half arisen from my arm-chair as he approached; he replaced me gently, and drew a chair to my side. As he came towards me, he had laid down, upon a table near at hand, a small parcel, very securely tied, and seemingly heavy. After we had interchanged a few unimportant sentences, his manner changed, and I perceived at once that he was satisfied with the result of the close observation of my state which he had been making as he spoke, and had decided on proceeding to the object of his visit.

'I have much to say to you, Miss Henderson,' he began, 'which must be painful for me to speak, and for you to hear, and therefore I will make it as short as possible; and first, while I have the grace to say it, let me tell you how deeply and bitterly I have repented any share which may possibly be ascribed to me in the calamity which has affected you so severely. In reality, the event was beyond my power to influence; but had I been more watchful, had I had more self-control—

in plain words, had I kept myself sober—something less dreadful might have happened, or, at all events, the deed might not have been done while she was with us.

'You allude to Mrs Stamer's suicide?' I asked. 'You must remember,' I said, 'that I know nothing of the circumstances which occurred after I left her on the night of her death.'

'And I, little, I am ashamed to say, of my own knowledge. I had drunk very hard that night. I do not wish to excuse myself in your eyes, Miss Henderson, or to deny the strength of the propensity, which'—he said quickly—'I am honestly trying to overcome; but I may tell you, as some little extenuation, that I have had some heavy cares; they are crushing me yet'—this he said with a queer shrug of the shoulders, habitual to him; 'and that night, in talking with Stamer, they rose up and beset me, and I got excited, partly by the storm, and partly by his questioning and his coolness, I think, and—and, in fact, I was scarcely steady enough to mix your medicine. I had to get Stamer to drop the laudanum for me; and after I left you, I was quite stupid, and lay down in my clothes, and knew nothing more until the alarm was given.'

'How was the alarm given?' I asked.

'It appears Stamer awoke, went to the door of his cabin, with the intention of going to see how his wife was, and found the door locked, and the key removed. He then shouted to some one to come and burst the door open; but owing to the noise and confusion caused by the storm, it was some time before he could make himself heard.'

'Do you know how long he had been in his own cabin?'

'He said he had left Mrs Stamer sleeping quietly at a little after one.'

'At what hour had you given me my medicine?'

'It was about ten o'clock, I think.'

'Did you see Mr Stamer afterwards?'

'Yes, I did; but I don't remember anything that passed, except his telling me that he found the tediousness of our voyage very hard to bear, with such a load of anxiety on his mind.'

'Did you say anything of your opinion of Mrs Stamer's improved condition to him on that occasion?'

'No, not then; but I had done so in the course of the day.'

'How did he receive what you said?'

'It did not appear to give him any pleasure or confidence. He said he had often seen her as well just before the most violent outbreaks.'

'Who made the discovery of Mrs Stamer's suicide?'

'I do not know. I was roused by the noise, and by the efforts of some one to get your door open. But why dwell on all this, dear Miss Henderson? A part of my object in coming here to-day was to induce you to promise me to dismiss this dreadful event from your memory, as far as your volition can avail to do so.'

'I will,' I said earnestly—'I will, indeed; but, pray, let me know all. To be in ignorance, is only to insure my constantly dwelling on my own suppositions and theories. Let me hear all, and I will recur to it no more.'

'Well, I will tell you the little, the very little there is to be told. The unhappy maniac had locked you and her husband securely into your

cabins, and then locked her own door, before she commenced the work of destruction.'

'She locked the three doors, you say—her own, her husband's, and mine—then what had she done with the keys?'

'It is concluded that she must have thrown them through the window into the sea, at least those of your cabin and that of Stamer. We found the key of her own among the heap of fragments on the floor.'

'How was that possible? The windows are all secured at night, and there was a storm blowing then. Was the window found open or broken?'

'I cannot tell you indeed. I do not think any one looked or inquired; attention was so completely absorbed in the poor creature who had realised all my worst fears.'

'With what weapon had she killed herself?'

'Ah, Miss Henderson,' he replied with a look of acute pain, 'though, of course, it does not really make any difference, I have a horror of the remembrance that it was a knife belonging to me which she got hold of. I am afraid I am a careless fellow at all times, and I must have dropped it out of my pocket when I went to see her for the last time that evening. She would have destroyed herself in some way, of course, but not in this, had I been as cautious as I should have been.'

'I don't see that,' I said. 'She could have secured one of Mr Stamer's razors, or a table-knife, had she been bent upon it. Indeed, I wonder she did not; it must have been a mere chance her finding your knife.'

'Yes,' he said gloomily, 'it was a mere chance, and an unfortunate one. But you are wrong in supposing she could have gotten at Stamer's razors. He often told me what excessive precaution he invariably employed to keep everything of the kind out of her way, whenever the least symptom of illness appeared.'

'When you visited her for the last time, did you see any symptom of fever or excitement?'

'Not the least; her pulse was quiet, and I was perfectly satisfied.'

'Forgive me, Dr Alexander, but I must ask you one personal question. Were you more sober when you saw Helen Stamer alive for the last time, than when you brought me the medicine which Mr Stamer had assisted you to mix?'

'Yes, Miss Henderson, I was: in the interval, he and I had been drinking.'

'Was he perfectly sober when he went into his wife's cabin after I had left it?'

'What! Stamer? Why, Stamer could drink any quantity without being the worse of it. Of course, he was perfectly sober. He has told me that he never was drunk in his life, and I quite believe him.'

'Will you tell me, now, exactly what happened, as far as it can be known?' I leaned back in my chair as I spoke, and covered my face with my hands.

He said slowly and gravely: 'She had no doubt awaked shortly after Stamer left her, got up, and secured the doors of her cabin and yours. He had shut his door, and therefore did not hear her; you were under the influence of the laudanum I had given you. She must then have returned to her cabin, and begun to tear up and destroy all its contents. It was about six in the morning when she was discovered.'

'How long had she been dead?' I asked faintly.

'No doubt some hours; she was cold, and had

almost stiffened into the attitude in which he found her.

'And yet, only five hours had elapsed since the time at which her husband had left her sleeping quietly; and she had had time to tear and cut up so large a quantity of clothes and other articles, to inflict a horrible wound upon herself, to bleed to death, and to be cold and stiff, before she was discovered? Is there nothing unusual in this, Dr Alexander? It would take a long time to tear up the contents of that box.'

'That is true,' he said; 'but this is a case in which everything is extraordinary, and the furious frantic rage of a maniac makes anything like a calculation of time impossible.'

'Can you tell me anything more?'

'Nothing but this: she must have entertained the purpose of suicide before Stamer left her. You remember I told you he dropped your laudanum for me? Well, he put the bottle in his pocket, and took it out accidentally, while talking to her. She must have seen it, and contrived to take it, as he sat by her cot, for I found it under her pillow, and the moment I approached the body, I perceived the odour of opium; indeed, only that she could not have inflicted such a wound had any degree of lethargy fallen upon her, I should have said, from the appearance of the eyes, that stupor existed at the time of her death.'

'Had you given her any medicine that night, after I left her?'

'Yes; I found Stamer anxious about her, and I gave him a composing draught, but not of laudanum, to be administered, if he should find her becoming restless, later in the night.'

'Had you told her yourself that she was to have any medicine that night, under any circumstances?'

'Yes, I told her I would procure her a sound sleep, and she said: "Thank you, doctor, but I can sleep now of my own accord." Those were the last words I ever heard her utter.'

'Then you gave Mr Stamer the sleeping-draught for her provisionally, and at his request?'

'Yes, I did. And now, let me entreat you not to distress yourself further. I cannot tell you more; indeed, I know nothing, for your state became at once so alarming that it absorbed all my attention. Stamer's anxiety was excessive on your account. He shut himself up in his cabin, and never appeared except to inquire for you.'

'Was he in deep grief?' I asked; and the hard tone in my voice struck unpleasantly on my ear.

'Well, not in grief precisely—horror was his feeling, I should say.'

'Was he present when she was buried in the deep?' I had a fierce battle with myself for composure as I asked this question.

'O no, no one; not even I saw him that day. There was great sympathy with him, of course, and everything was done to spare his feelings. I must say he behaved well, and felt more than I gave him credit for. He looked older, and his face was haggard, the day we landed. And this mention of him brings me to the principal object of my visit.'

As he spoke, he stretched his hand towards the table, and took from it the parcel which he had deposited there on his entrance. He cut the string which secured it, removed the paper in which it was enveloped, and displayed a jewel-case, of dark-

green morocco leather, with a gold lock. He then took from his pocket a small golden key, which he placed in my hand, and said: 'Stamer asked me to hand you this, Miss Henderson, and to beg your acceptance of the jewels contained in this case. He did not feel equal to seeing or writing to you, but he begged me to assure you of his undying gratitude and esteem.'

My heart grew sick, my brow grew moist, my sight failed me. Had he dared to send me the dead woman's jewels—the gems that had glistened on that gashed throat; the gold that had gleamed amidst the blood-steeped hair; the gewgaws that had encircled the stiffening fingers I had seen pendent in the sullen pool of her own lifeblood? Had he dared to do this audacious deed? I unlocked the jewel-case, and there they lay—a sparkling, symmetrical, gorgeous display, more hateful in my eyes than any words could tell. I closed the lid in silence, and after the delay of a moment, Dr Alexander said: 'Shall I convey any message from you to Stamer? I must write this evening to tell him that I have discharged my trust.'

'Thank you; no. I will write to Mr Stamer myself. What is his address?'

'He is at present staying in Paris, at Meurice's; but he is going almost immediately to Italy, with his mother and sisters.'

'Does he keep up any communication with you?'

'None, beyond having given me his address, in order that I might tell him when I had seen you. He insisted on my taking one hundred pounds from him, for my attendance on poor Mrs Stamer. I shall hardly ever get such a fee again.'

'You cannot know how well you earned it,' I said.

For a moment he turned a half-startled look upon me, as if there had been something in my tone which struck him unpleasantly. But he was all unconscious of my thoughts; he judged everything by a foregone conclusion. No, I would not say anything, at least not yet.

'And now, Miss Henderson,' he said, rising from his chair as he spoke, and taking my hand kindly in his, 'I will take leave of you for to-day. May I advise you to lie down at once, and try to turn your thoughts into some more cheerful channel. Do not attempt to write to Stamer for the present; you are not yet equal to any unnecessary agitation; you look exhausted now. I fear I have stayed too long. Good-bye.' And so he left me. To what?

A L I E.

A THISTLE grew in a sluggard's croft,
Rough, and rank with a thorny growth,
With its spotted leaves, and its purple flowers
(Blossoms of Sin, and bloom of Sloth);
Slowly it ripened its baneful seeds,
And away they went in swift gray showers.

But every seed was cobweb winged,
And they spread o'er a hundred miles of land.
'Tis centuries now since they first took flight,
In that careless, gay, and mischievous band,
Yet still they are blooming and ripening fast,
And spreading their evil by day and night